

Blood money

The blood money tradition continues

Simon Chapman

Rogue industries calculate that donating to unassailably worthy causes provides morally bullet-proof cover

Imagine if the late Slobodan Milosovic had donated to Kosovar refugee relief. Or the infamous and unrepentant Australian serial backpacker killer Ivan Milat had sent cheques to a victims of crime charity? In 2000, the SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome) Foundation in Australia was embarrassed by Philip Morris's support for its Red Nose Day fundraiser, as smoking along with a prone sleeping position are the two main risk factors for SIDS.¹

But can there be a better candidate for the most cynically calculated piece of charitable donation yet than British American Tobacco's (BAT) current public support of Guide Dogs of Australia?² There are an estimated 8200 cases of smoking related blindness in Australia

caused by accelerating age related macular degeneration.³ There is even a pack warning⁴ and a TV advertisement on the issue.

Rogue industries calculate that donating to unassailably worthy causes provides morally bullet-proof cover. The cheque's in the mail and on with our day job, right?

Philip Morris has given support to domestic violence, homelessness, Aboriginal health, and BAT to tsunami relief. Who would be churlish enough to ever question such donations, they reason. The recipients are often desperate and thankful, and unlikely to give immediate thought to where the money comes from. It's the ends that count, not the means.

Precisely. BAT's donation is a wafer thin slice of its annual profit, drawn from

its day job sales of products which slowly send thousands blind. The company has been aware since at least 1998⁵ about the research on smoking's effects on the eyes, but has never warned its customers. Many parents teach their children that charity should be anonymous, not a cause for self aggrandisement. We should be all in favour of such industries privately and silently unloading their guilt money onto good causes. But would it be too much to ask BAT to spare everyone the applause and do it anonymously?

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